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ABSTRACT

There is a widely shared belief that Asian Americans have overcome the bondage of racial discrimination to become a successful model minority. In this essay, the empirical basis of this success contention is examined against its historical background and the ramifications of the belief are explored. First, the ascendance of the Asian American success theme in the late 1960s is traced. The portrayal of Asian Americans as a hardworking, successful group is contrasted to popular racist beliefs held about blacks. Second, recent research on Asian Americans is examined. It is argued that available evidence does not warrant the image of this group's success because typical indicators of success, such as education and income, have not been properly adjusted for extraneous factors. Finally, several consequences of the success myth are identified. It is held that: (1) Asian Americans, particularly the young people, resent the success contention as a device of political exploitation; (2) a pattern of occupational segregation for Asian Americans limits occupational aspiration and choices of Asian American youth; and (3) Asian Americans experience a sense of lost identity and attribute this feeling to the pressures of assimilation and to their ancestors' concern for survival. (Author/GC)

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The Myth of Asian American Success and Its Educational Ramifications

Ki-Taek Chun

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a widely shared belief that Asian Americans not only have overcome the bondage of racial discrimination, but also have become a successful model minority worthy of emulation by other minorities. Asian Americans are said to be better educated, to be earning as much as any group, to be well assimilated, and to manifest low rates of social deviance. This contention seems firmly entrenched because it is allegedly supported by scientific, empirical research.

The following essay examines the empirical basis of this success contention against its historical background, and explores its ramifications. It explores the way in which the popular belief of Asian American success has come into prominence in order to arrive at a sociopolitical understanding of the contention. It critically evaluates the empirical basis, exposing the shaky, untenable ground on which the thesis of Asian American success stands, and illustrates some of the major consequences of this success myth. The essay demonstrates that the premise of Asian American success is in urgent need of reassessment by educators.

The first part of three parts (Section 2) will trace the ascendance of the Asian American success theme in the second half of the 1960's, at a time when the nation was agonizing over its civil rights turmoils and their aftermath. The portrayal of Asian Americans as a hard-working, successful group was usually accompanied by invidious comparisons to Blacks, as if to suggest that the industrious docility Asian American style was the solution to racial discrimination.

The second part (Section 3) will critically examine the nature of the alleged scientific research basis and show that the available evidence does not warrant the popular belief in Asian American success. A major argument will be that typical indicators of success, such as education and income, have not been properly adjusted for extraneous factors. (For income, for example, variables such as the number of wage earners, the education of wage earners, and the type of occupation must be considered.) Numerous research journal articles and monographs that use either 1970 census or more recent regional statistics will be examined.

Based on a review of diverse sources, the third part of this essay (Section 4) will illustrate several consequences of the success myth and pursue their educational ramifications. It will be shown that:

1. Asian Americans, their youths in particular, resent the success contention as a device of political exploitation.
2. A pattern of occupational segregation for Asian Americans delimits the range of occupational aspirations and choices of Asian American youths.
3. Asian Americans experience a sense of lost identity and attribute this feeling to the pressures of assimilation and to their ancestors' concern for survival.

II. THE "SUCCESS" MYTH. ITS EVOLUTION AND PREVALENCE

It was in the 1960's—when the plight of Black Americans was occupying the nation's attention as it tried to cope with their assertive demands for racial equality—that two of the nation's most influential print media presented to the American public a portrait of Asian Americans as a successful model minority. The portrait created a glowing image of a population that, despite past discrimination, has succeeded in becoming a hard-working, uncomplaining minority deserving to serve as a model for other minorities.

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At that time, when the nation was still groping for solutions to its racial unrest, the portrayal of Asian Americans as a successful minority seemed to serve a need; the image quickly caught on and dominated the stage for years. Despite objections, this image is still prevalent today. It has seeped deep into the thinking of policy makers and the general public, and has become a firmly entrenched belief among commentators and social scientists. It is visible everywhere—in the mass media, in social commentaries, in social science literature, and even at the high levels of our Federal government. In a 1966 *New York Times* essay "Success Story, Japanese American Style," sociologist William Peterson categorically states "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better off than any other group in our society including native-born whites.... Even in a country whose patron saint is the *Horatio Alger* hero, there is no parallel to this success story" (pp. VI-20).

The same year, *U.S. News and World Report* featured an article entitled "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S." It begins:

> At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities.... At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift the Negroes and other minorities.... The Nation's 30 thousand Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own—with no help from anyone else.... Winning wealth and respect by dint of his own hard work. [1966: 73]

The article portrays Chinese Americans as an industrious, hardworking, uncomplaining group willing to "do something" instead of "sitting around moaning."

Such depictions of success have circulated widely in newspapers and magazines since that time. A 1970 *New York Times* article, "Japanese Joining Hawaii's Elite," describes the rise of Japanese Americans in Hawaii to positions of leadership as businessmen, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and members of government (p. 17).

A 1971 *Newsweek* article presents an updated version of the global success portrait of Japanese Americans under the forceful title "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites" (p. 24), while a 1975 *Time* magazine article, "The Americans of Japanese Ancestry: Fast Rising Sons," notes that "Americans of Japanese ancestry . . . have flourished in the islands [Hawaii] and now dominate [the islands'] politics" (p. 26). A similar theme appears in a 1977 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled "Japanese in U.S. Outdo Horatio Alger." Not only does the theme become repetitious, but it acquires momentum with each repetition: the article concludes: "despite great odds, Japanese Americans have become the most successful racial minority in U.S. history" (p. I-1). In a similar vein, a 1978 *Washington Post* article "Korean Americans: Pursuing Economic Success" (p. 1) recapitulates the theme that through hard work, success can be won even by the latest of the immigrant groups, the Korean Americans.

The portrayal of Asian Americans as a successful model minority has not been limited to the mass print media: A close parallel has evolved in the social science literature. In a paper comparing "the position of U.S. Orientals with that of U.S. Negroes," Makaroff notes that "for Niseis [second generation Japanese Americans] race discrimination against them is virtually nonexistent today. They mingle freely and easily with white Americans, and there are practically no professional jobs that are not held by them" (1967: 311). He draws a sweeping conclusion:

> ...practically none of them live in poverty, and many of them even have highly paid professional jobs. Moreover, juvenile delinquency and adult crime are virtually unheard of among them. Despite their bitter . . . background of racial discriminations and persecutions, the second generation Japanese Americans are now accepted as clean, decent, and law abiding citizens in all American communities. [p. 314]

During the same year, a more data-based research paper (Varon 1966) was published. Basing her conclusions on the demonstration of upward changes in educational attainment and occupational status of the Japanese Americans between 1950 and 1960, Varon asserts that Japanese Americans no longer constitute a "minority" in the sense that minority status carries with it the connotation of exclusion from full participation in the life of the society.

The significance of Varon's study lies in the frequency with which her conclusions have been cited by other researchers as a major reference. Petersen (1971: 120) cited Varon approvingly in what, as will be noted presently, has become one of the two most influential references in the field. Varon's conclusions also provided a context for a comparative study of minorities (Jiobu 1976) from which the following points are drawn:

> For present purposes, the major point is that Asian Americans, particularly the Japanese, have achieved substantial gains and have appeared to be exceptions to the traditional argument that prejudice and discrimination by the majority retard the social economic achievements of the minority...Asian Americans have attained more in the way of economic advancement while Chicanos and Blacks remain minorities in Varon's sense of the term. [1976: 25]

Thus, there emerges from Varon's work and its subsequent citations a consistent image of Asian Americans no longer occupying a minority status, but fully participating in American society with its attendant economic benefits.

The ascendancy of Asian Americans as a model minority reached its peak with the publication of two important books, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* by Kitano (1969) and *Japanese Americans: Oppression and Success* by Petersen (1971). Petersen reiterated his contention that Japanese Americans are better off than any other segment of American society, including native-born Whites, and that they, unlike other minorities with a history of oppression, "have realized this remarkable progress by their own almost unaided effort" (p. 4). Kitano also views the evolution of Japanese Americans as an un-

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mistakable success story, citing the high income and educational levels (1969: 1) of Japanese Americans, whose "most optimistic dreams have been surpassed" (1969: 147). The 1976 revision of his book shows little change in its view.

Kitano and Petersen are key references in the field, and continue to exert influence on the contemporary scene. It was on the basis of their work that, in 1975, Sowell drew the following conclusions:

> Japanese Americans have been the most successful nonwhite immigrant group in America, whether success is measured in income, education, and similar achievements or in low rates of crime, mental illness, and other forms of social pathology. [1975 b: 92-93, 255]

Editors Marden and Meyers in their volume, *Minorities in American Society,* asked whether Asian Americans "are still a minority in any other sense than numerical" (1973:410). The book's coverage of Japanese Americans had relied almost exclusively on Kitano and Petersen. Slawson, in a commentary on Asian Americans, once again repeats the success portrait (1979:53), basing his depiction not on the work of Kitano and Petersen, but on the secondary source of Marden and Meyers, who relied on Kitano and Petersen. It is tempting to predict a citation of Slawson as the basis of yet another version of the success portrait. Perhaps this is the way a myth is propagated.

The assertion that Asian Americans are a successful group had become, by the early 1970's, an established "fact"—leading some social scientists to state that "the success of Chinese and Japanese is a matter of record" (Sue and Kitano 1973:92). Contemporary examples of this ingrained belief are readily discernible in the work of many prominent authors (e.g., Glazer 1978:xii; Petersen 1978:65-106; and Sowell 1978:212-237).

It is clear that both Kitano and Petersen, and many others who rely on them, accept the success of Japanese Americans as an undisputed fact. Their interest lies in being able to account for that success by identifying elements of the subculture responsible for it.

> The Japanese Americans ought to be a central focus of social studies. This is a laboratory case of an exception . . . we might find a means of isolating some of the elements of this remarkable culture and grafting it onto plants that manifestly need the pride, persistence and the success of our model minority.

So writes Kitano, quoting Petersen's 1966 *New York Times* article (1969:2).

What emerges is an evolving process of reification: first, a portrait of success is rendered; that image of success is reified into a reality deemed beyond dispute; then a search begins for the success-inducing elements in the reified reality. Such a search is epistemologically futile, but that is not the topic of this essay. For our purpose, however, it is important to recognize that the success literature has failed to explicate the sociopolitical context by which Asian Americans were suddenly propelled into a success group worthy of emulation.

Compared to the 1960's, we are now in a period of enhanced political sensitivity, and to dwell excessively on earlier studies from a period past would be counterproductive. Accordingly, our purpose here is not so much to criticize the success literature of the 1960's as to demonstrate how we have become easy victims of the success myth. Several other authors have expressed similar concerns in recent years (Hune 1977; Suzuki 1977a).

III. EXAMINATION OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

The Indicators of Success

All myths die hard, if ever, but what makes the myth of Asian American success so invincible and contagious is the generally accepted belief that it is based on scientific, empirical research evidence. Therefore, an examination of the empirical evidence becomes crucial. This section evaluates available evidence to ascertain whether or not the alleged evidence indeed supports the contention of Asian American success.

As a preliminary, it might be helpful to place into a larger context those indicators—education, occupation, and income—that have traditionally been used as measures of success, remembering the contextualist perspective that "context defines meaning and meaning shifts with its context." Social statistics become useful only when one understands the social and political context in which—and the purpose for which—they are being used. What is appropriate for one purpose could be misleading and even abusive for another. Therefore, before using any set of statistics, one should first determine its appropriateness for the specific purpose. For example, in order to use the median grade completed as an indicator of how well a minority group is doing, one must consider such related questions as the distribution of grades completed among group members, distribution of specializations, cost of education vis-à-vis family income, and rewards of education in terms of occupation and wage. The reasons for this are simple. If members of a minority group view education as the only means of social mobility and invest heavily in their children's college education at a disproportionate sacrifice to family finances, should that college education be regarded necessarily as a sign of success of this group? It might reflect a story of disproportionate sacrifices for college education or of society's delimiting mobility structure. If college graduates of a minority group make, say, as much as high school graduates of the majority group, is college graduation a sign of success or an indictment of wage inequity? If members of a minority group, believing that certain desirable occupations are practically closed to them, choose a second or third best occupation open to them, shouldn't it be regarded more as an indication of painful resignation to limited occupational opportunity? If a large number of highly educated professionals emigrate from a foreign nation, thus raising the educational level of the ethnic group to which they belong, is it proper to say that the group is successful since it has a high level of educational attainment? The point here is simply that the level of educational attainment is open to multiple interpretations. As such, unless it is accompanied by statistics that clarify its meaning by placing it in a proper context, the use of educational attainment as a solitary indicator of success is highly suspect.

The use of broad occupational categories as an indicator of success is likewise crude. To argue that a minority is doing as well as the majority solely because of its proportion of white-collar workers in the labor force, is overly simplistic, unless one is prepared to accept the proposition that the position of a clerk typist is equivalent to that of a company president or a mid-level staff member to an administrative chief.

The use of household income as a success indicator is also fraught with problems unless methodological controls

are incorporated to avoid interpretive ambiguity. Consider a typical husband-wife, two-wage earner situation. For those families whose total income is about the national average, the two wages are likely to be the result of financial necessity, entailing sacrifice and hidden cost to household maintenance. If minority families earn close to the national average when both spouses work, whereas non-minority families achieve this standard through a single wage earner, must we accept the conclusion that this minority is doing well just because families of this group make as much as the national average?

The value of household income depends on family size or on the composition of those who rely on the income in part or in whole. The size of the nuclear family is known to vary across racial and ethnic groups, and the extent of informal extended family systems may also vary across groups. One may also consider income from other than wages (e.g., stocks and bonds, inheritance, assistance from parents or relatives). Ownership of property and assets contributes heavily to economic well-being, but it is not reflected in wage income.

Similarly, high income may be a result of longer work hours or sacrificed weekends. It follows that for the household income to be a usable index for purposes of group comparison, one has to make adjustments for the number of wage earners and the number of hours worked. In addition, since education is known to be a substantial contributor to occupational mobility as well as higher income, the level of wage income should be adjusted at least for wage earner's education. Since salary levels vary across occupation and minority groups differ from the majority in their profiles of occupational distribution, it is only logical that wage income should be adjusted for occupational type as well as educational level. (Similar concern for various decontaminations appears in a perceptive footnote of Gee's 1976 essay, Footnote 4, pp. 11-12.)

In addition, it must be noted that until recently, assimilation rather than pluralism has been the dominant perspective of our society. This has hindered the public from recognizing explicitly that the quintessence of well-being is subjective: The well-being of a group should be gauged by how the members of the group themselves feel about their own lot. As for Asian Americans, the labelling of success has been imposed from without; how Asian Americans themselves feel about their own status has been ignored. Since their efforts at materialistic sustenance were prompted by the pressures of Americanization against the backdrop of legally-imposed discrimination, and since they feel locked into a second-class citizenship bound by a "thin gray line" of subtle discrimination, Asian Americans would find it frivolous to be called successful by others. The comfort of secure subsistence and the pride of education may well be overshadowed by the resignation to a second-class status or by the denial of one's heritage and, hence, identity. Viewed from this contextualist perspective, it is evident that the success label should be withheld until the context in which it is used and its ramifications are fully recognized.

The Literature of Success

The empirical literature that allegedly supports the success contention reveals two trends. The 1960's literature generally drew conclusions in support of the success argument, despite its failure to incorporate the type of methodological controls described earlier in this section. A few studies from this period contradicting the success theme have remained unnoticed, if not ignored, by the main body of the 1960's and subsequent success literature. Several studies published in the 1970's using the 1970 census data indicate the status of Asian Americans to be incongruent with that suggested by the stereotype of success or the dominant literature of the 1960's. Curiously, however, the current success literature has neither noticed nor refuted the contraindicative studies of the 1970's: There is a mutual disregard between the success contention and its counterevidence.

As indicated in Section 2, one of the two initial salvos for what was to become a campaign of Asian American success was the 1966 *New York Times* article by Petersen. He based his general argument on 1) the higher level of educational attainment in 1960 (12.2 years for the Japanese compared to 11.0 for Whites), 2) the higher occupational attainment in 1960 (56 percent of the Japanese in white-collar jobs compared to 42 percent of Whites), and 3) low rates of crime and delinquency. The other salvo, the 1966 *U.S. News and World Report* article, was less data-oriented but rested on the same type of evidence.

In her influential paper using the census data of 1950 and 1960, Varon (1967) compares urban Japanese Americans with their White counterparts in educational attainment and occupational status and bases her conclusions—that Japanese Americans could no longer be termed minority members or be classified with Blacks or Mexican Americans—on findings of increased urban population, high educational level, and improved occupational status.

An analysis of the industrial classifications of the 1960 census leads Yuan (1969) to show a shift in occupational trends of Chinese Americans away from the "traditional" jobs such as laundry workers and small restaurant owners toward professional fields. In noting that the predicted as well as observed disappearance of certain low prestige jobs will create a new occupational image of Chinese Americans, the author implies that such disappearance would be an indication of Chinese Americans' improving status.

In a 1965 study based on an analysis of the 1940 to 1960 trends, Schmid and Nobbe (1965a) examined education, occupation, and income of nonwhite races and compared them with that of their White counterparts. They report what by now must have acquired a familiar ring: 1) a

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greater proportion of college graduates among Chinese and Japanese Americans than among the total White population, 2) Japanese Americans ahead of Whites in terms of median grade completed, and 3) a greater proportion of Chinese and Japanese Americans in white-collar occupations (see Figures 3,4,5 and Tables 3 and 4). There is however, an interesting twist to the Schmid and Nobbe paper: as a caveat, the authors note that Chinese and Japanese Americans lag behind Whites in income despite their lead in educational status, and mention discrimination as a possible factor (p. 918). The authors neither elaborate on this point, nor pursue the ramifications of this differential return on education, even though, had they placed emphasis on the income differential, they could have argued from the same finding that rather than enjoying the rewards of higher educational attainment, Asian Americans were suffering from inequity and societal constraints.

Kitano's statement: "Common measures of success find the Japanese on the 'right' side of the ledger. Both [their] income and education levels are high" (1969:1) is without direct supporting documentation. References to education in this book pertain to such topics as school segregation in the early 1900's, employment discrimination for qualified Japanese teachers before World War II, and the quality of education in the relocation camps during the war, but not to whether education brings about commensurate return in the form of appropriate jobs and income.

Petersen's book (1971), already noted as one of the two major works along with Kitano's, presents a similar problem. Recognizing education as the main key to material success, Petersen cites the study by Schmid and Nobbe (1971:113), adding one qualifier to his overall success interpretation: "at least as of that date [1959], a considerable discrimination persisted, since a group with qualifications that should have demanded larger salaries in fact earned less on the average" (pp.120-122). However, the discussion of Schmid and Nobbe is left inconspicuous and is overshadowed by the prevailing theme of "phenomenal economic and social success," as exemplified by the title of a key chapter, "Six Times Down, Seven Times Up." Consistently, these studies fail to account or adjust for extraneous variables, thus leaving the indicators of educational attainment and income susceptible to misleading interpretations.

Before we move on to the 1970's, we must highlight a study by Fogel (1966) that provides an instructive contrast to Schmid and Nobbe (1965 a and b) in its perspective and interpretation. In "The Effects of Low Educational Attainment on Income: A Comparative Study of Selected Ethnic Groups," Fogel uses the 1960 census data to evaluate education in terms of how it converts into income for selected minority groups. His guiding premise is that since schooling has substantial income value for those who obtain it, high levels of education should lead to desirable occupations with greater earnings, increased chances for promotion, and relative stability (pp.22-23). Finding that a given number of years of education has less value for the members of the "disadvantaged" minority population, he concludes that income benefits derived from educational investment for Asian Americans have been lagging and deficient for at least 20 years—i.e., 1940 to 1960 (pp. 36 and 38, Table 6). His interpretation and conclusions, unlike those of Varon (1967) and Schmid and Nobbe (1965 a and b), contradict the overall success interpretation of the 1960 census data. In particular, he demonstrates that the income picture of Asian Americans, when adjusted for education, does not imply success. Had one incorporated additional controls such as occupational type, tenure, upward mobility, and the number of wage earners, the glitter of success that many reported in the 1960's would have disappeared even more rapidly. Unfortunately, this study remained unnoticed by Kitano (1969 and 1976), Petersen (1971), and the authors of other success literature.

The social science studies of the 1970's, as a whole, indicate that the socioeconomic status of Asian Americans is nowhere near the level of success conveyed by the stereotype. They also show that lumping all Asian Americans into one category is oversimplistic; it covers up serious differences among Asian American groups. And, within each group, there are socioeconomic differences: laborers working long hours in restaurants or garment factories; Nobel laureates in science; and representatives and senators in the U.S. Congress. If they are sometimes called "Americanized" model members of Asian descent, their immigrant counterparts are viewed as foreign, unacculturated, and unassimilable. Just as there are educated individuals who emigrated with financial resources or professional skills after the 1965 liberalization of the immigration quota, there are pensioners who emigrated as laborers before the Depression and were forced to remain single (because of past immigration restrictions) and who now quietly live out the remainder of their lonely lives on Social Security.

A study by Wilber, Jaco, Hagan, and deFierro (1975) based on the 1970 census data is a curious exception to the 1970's studies. Although the authors provide a glowing picture of Asian American success, a closer examination of their data reveals something different. For example, the participation rate for the "services" category occupation is three and four times higher for Filipino and Chinese males than for White males (i.e., 20.3 and 25.1 vs. 6.4 percent), but the rate for such categories as "managers, sales, crafts, and operatives" is lower for Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Filipino men (p. 60). Nevertheless, the authors conclude that "Oriental men are concentrated heavily in white-collar occupations. Japanese, Chinese, and Korean men compare favorably with white men in this respect" (p. 59).

Their study also shows that at every level of education from none to post-graduate, Chinese, Korean, and Filipino males make less than their White counterparts. For Japanese American males, the pattern is slightly different—they make more than Whites through the high school level, but less above the high school level. Thus, all Asian American males with more than high school education make less than their White counterparts (Wilber, et al. 1975:141, Table 6.06). Yet, they conclude that

> the pattern of similarities in the earnings of Orientals and whites by 1970 takes on special significance, since it suggests that being nonwhite in the U.S. is not tantamount to economic hardship. Moreover, with the exception of Filipino men, Oriental men and women tend to average earnings as high as or higher than comparable whites. [p.161]

Almost half of the Asian Americans on the mainland (48 percent) are concentrated in the four metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, and the income of the metropolitan area residents is known to be higher than the national average or that in nonmetropolitan areas. Accordingly, either an adjustment for

metropolitan residency or separate analysis for metropolitan residents is essential to appraise the extent of economic well-being of Asian Americans. This point has been recognized by Owan (1975) and, in recent analyses of the 1970 census data, Cabezas (1977), Cabezas and Yee (1977),and Moulton (1978). These studies highlight how misleading the national aggregate data can be. According to Owan, for instance,

> The Chinese male median income was considerably lower than the white, Negro, and Spanish-origins in all the metropolitan areas except for Long Beach-Los Angeles; also their median income for Boston and New York were the lowest median income recorded among all groups in 1969. [1975:31-32]

Furthermore, Chinese and Filipino males all had lower median incomes than their White counterparts in the six metropolitan areas included in Owan's tabulation (p. 31, Table 1). This certainly contradicts the overall impression given by aggregate comparisons, $10,010 and $9,318 for Chinese and Filipino American families against $9,596 for the national median.

Moulton's tabulation reveals similar results for individual income. That is, Asian American males (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino) had median individual incomes lower than that of Whites in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco (1978: B-68, Table 10A). He further notes "A comparison with the incomes of black men shows that Chinese and Filipino men are no better off in their earning power" (p. B-67).

The ratio of Asian American to White male earnings computed by Cabezas tells the same story. All Asian American males—Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans (Korean Americans are not included in his analysis)—had lower incomes than Whites in the four metropolitan areas. Similarly, all three groups of Asian American females had incomes lower than White females, with the exception of Filipino females in Chicago and New York (Cabezas 1977:3, Table 3).

Had adjustment been made for education in these studies, the income differential would probably have been even greater. A recent report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1978), *Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women*, bears out this prediction by showing that the extent of income inequality becomes more pronounced after differences in education have been taken into account (p. 54, Table 4.3). For example, Japanese Americans in the period 1969-75 are shown to make more than Whites, but after adjustment has been made for education, they actually earn less than Whites with similar qualifications (p. 54, Table 4.3).

The study by Cabezas and Yee (1977) on the employment patterns of Asian Americans in the San Francisco-Oakland area is instructive. Through an analysis of the 1970 census data and the 1970 and 1975 data compiled by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on employment in large private industries, the authors show a grim picture of Asian American employment. Through meticulous tabulations, they demonstrate that

1. Asian Americans are underrepresented in the manager/administrator categories across all 132 industries studied (except for 3 industries that can be explained in terms of such idiosyncratic industry characteristics as the preponderance of ethnic restaurants and laundries) (pp. 134-136, Tables 2 and 3).
2. The rate of their labor-force participation is substantially below parity except in such industries as apparel products, where they are operatives (i.e., seamstresses); banking and insurance, where they are clerical workers; eating and drinking places, where they are service workers (i.e., waiters and waitresses); and hotels and health services, where they are mostly food and cleaning service workers (p. 83, also Fig. C-7, C-38, C-40 to C-44, C-46).
3. Their employment rate is low in high-wage industries, but high in low-wage industries (p. 83, Fig. 12).
4. The family income of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans is lower than that of Whites, and the proportion of Asian American families below poverty level larger than that of Whites (p. 139 and Table 4).
5. The proportion of Asian American families with multiple wage earners exceeds that of Whites (p. 139 and Table 5), and the income of Asian American wage earners lags far behind that of their White counterparts (p. 139 and Table 6).

These findings hardly suggest a picture of occupational or economic success for Asian Americans, and the disparities uncovered by these authors would be grimmer if adjustment had been made for the higher level of educational attainment.

A recent report by the Civil Service Commission of the State of California (1976) indicates that Asian Americans in California's Civil Service are underrepresented in administrative, decision-making positions. Using the California portion of the 1970 census data, Jiobu (1976) demonstrates that the high educational attainment of Asian Americans is not being rewarded by commensurate income or occupation. Using the same data, Wong (1974) shows that at the intermediate level of education and experience, Chinese Americans are so well paid so as to compensate their underpay at the higher level. In fact, they are so well paid at the intermediate level that the average income for Chinese Americans is raised, thus obscuring the deficit at the higher level.

The employment situation of professional Asian Americans is equally grim. According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates conducted by the National Academy of Sciences (Gilford and Snyder 1977), more than 60 percent of all doctorate awardees have definite offers of employment at the time their degrees are awarded (e.g., 68 percent in 1973, 67 percent in 1974, 69 percent in 1975, and 63 percent in 1976). Over the four-year period from 1973 to 1976, the proportion of Asian American doctorate awardees with definite employment offers was always lower than that of Whites, Blacks, American Indians, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. In 1975, for instance, the proportions of male doctorates with definite employment at the time they received their degrees were 65.8 for Blacks, 66.5 percent for Chicanos, and 68 percent for Puerto Ricans, all higher than 62.7 percent for Whites—but for Asian Americans it was only 44.8 percent. As for Asian American female doctorates, in 1975 their proportion was 52.1 percent, the lowest of all female groups, compared to the 58.5 percent for all female doctorates (pp. 60-62, Table I-17).

The Survey of Doctoral Scientists and Engineers conducted by the National Research Council (Gilford and Snyder 1977) illuminates another side of the Asian American doctorates' employment status. Among the post-1970 doctoral scientists and engineers employed in institutions of higher education, Asian Americans received

the lowest median annual salary in 1975 (pp. 80-81). Analysis of the American Council on Education data (1972-1973) led Sowell (1975a) to conclude:

> Orientals receive less than either blacks or whites with the same qualifications, and only the fact that Orientals have generally better qualifications than either of the other two groups conceal this. [p. 17]

Compared to the majority and to other minority groups, then, more Asian Americans go to college and ultimately earn their doctoral degrees; but upon graduation, fewer job opportunities are available to them, and even when they are employed, their salaries are lower. The emerging picture of Asian American doctorates is not one of success, but rather one of unrewarded effort and frustration.

Fields of specialization for Asian American doctorates reveal another problem. According to one National Science Foundation report on minorities and women (1977), in 1973 the proportion of employed Asian American doctorates exceeded that of the total population in such fields as engineering, mathematics, and physical sciences. On the other hand, in fields such as social sciences and psychology, the proportion of Asian Americans fell far below that of the total population, the greatest discrepancy being in psychology, 2.9 percent for Asian Americans compared to 11.5 for the total population (p. 6). The same trend is uncovered in a 1975 survey of doctoral scientists and engineers that showed, in terms of relative proportions, more Asian American doctoral scientists employed in engineering and biosciences but less in psychology and social sciences (Gilford and Snyder 1977: 64). This trend exists among doctorates who received their degrees between 1973 and 1976 (Gilford and Snyder 1977: 40).

A similar distribution of undergraduate majors is revealed at one of the nation's largest universities with heavy enrollment of Asian American students (Sue and Frank 1973). Although reliable data are not available, the same trend probably exists on other campuses. Thus, there seems a general trend of Asian Americans overconcentrating in a limited range of specializations such as engineering and biophysical sciences where quantitative, nonlinguistic skills are at a premium, and of avoiding other fields like social sciences, humanities, and arts, whose primary vehicle for professional activities is either linguistic communication or interpersonal contacts.

If one of the shared goals of our society is to provide a full range of occupational opportunities, any barriers to this should become a matter of serious concern. Using a questionnaire survey of Chinese American youth in San Francisco, Wong (1977) observed that their occupational aspirations are influenced by their "fears of economic competition and racial prejudice, and the resultant discrimination" (p. 60). Occupational aspirations and choice are determined in part by the likelihood of success in the real world. Asian Americans may consider certain occupations and fields of specialization closed to them, and are resigned to a restricted range of occupational choices—pharmacy instead of medicine, business accounting rather than law, retail store ownership instead of corporate management, and so on. Such self-selection and self-restriction seem indeed to be at work (Wong 1977; Lan 1975).

IV. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The revelation that the alleged success of Asian Americans is a false image standing on tenuous empirical ground has educational, research, and political implications. This section will pursue three facets of the educational implication: resentment against the success stereotype, self-limiting occupational aspirations, and sense of lost identity.

Resentment Against The Success Myth

When a group generally viewed as successful is not represented in the process of policy deliberation, which is often the case with Asian Americans, that group may inadvertently become a victim of inattention or even exclusion. By 1973, observers were already noting such consequences of the success image:

> The widespread belief that Asian Americans have somehow overcome prejudice and discrimination has given them a low priority in terms of attention and aid. For example, in hiring, in admissions to institutions of higher education, and in financial aid, Asians are often regarded as whites. [Kitano & Sue 1973:1]

> Clearly, many Asian Americans and Pacific peoples are invisible to the governmental agencies which are responsible for providing public services. Discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific peoples is as much the result of omission as commission. [California State Advisory Committee 1975:58]

Hard evidence does not accompany these quotes or other references of similar nature (Hata & Hata 1976:11; New York State Advisory Committee 1977: 28; Sue, Sue, & Sue 1975:906), and it is difficult to come by. But these sources demonstrate that many observers have felt Asian Americans suffer from inattention or exclusion.

In addition, observers on Asian American affairs feel that the propulsion of Asian Americans into a "model" minority status was a means of political exploitation. They charge that the success portrait was designed to divert attention away from the racial problems of our society, thus victimizing Blacks and Hispanics as groups which, unlike Asian Americans, have allegedly failed through their own fault to take advantage of the available opportunities.

> As the Black and Brown communities push for changes in our present system, the Oriental is set forth as an example to be followed—a minority group that has achieved success through adaptation rather than confrontation. [*Gidra* 1969:6]

Even some of those who, in the past, have contributed heavily to the Asian American success theme now profess the feeling that the image of Asian American success has been abused

> The whites use us by saying to the others, Why can't you be like Japanese? The Chicanos and Blacks turn against us. [Kitano 1971: 24]

This sense of not only being neglected but also used has made many Asian Americans resentful of the success myth; they charge that Asian Americans "are used as 'proof' of a racial equality that does not exist, and as showpieces of how docile acceptance of white supremacy is the key to success for non-white Americans" (Kim 1975b: 140). Their sense of resentment and exploitation is discernible in a variety of sources, including such recent an-

thologies of Asian American writers as *Aiiieeeee!* (Chin, Chan, Inada & Wong 1974), *"Chink!"* (Wu 1972), *Counterpoint* (Gee 1976), and *Roots* (Tachiki, Wong, Odo & Wong 1971). In a thoughtful overview on Japanese Americans, Endo (1974) provides a cogent observation that a growing number of Japanese Americans take exception to what has rapidly become a stereotype of success and rebel against using a model minority notion as an "example to other racial and ethnic groups . . . on how progress should be made in American society" (p.203).

Given the besetting feeling of resentment among Asian Americans against being singled out as a model minority, we, as teachers, must first become aware of the tenuous nature of evidence upon which the success contention has stood, and then choose carefully the context in which ethnic intergroup comparisons and the status of Asian Americans are presented to our students. To portray Asian Americans as a successful minority (however well-intentioned) would intensify distrust among resentful students and would undermine our credibility as teachers. In the long run, students would benefit from understanding how Asian Americans have come to be viewed as a successful model minority and from inquiring into the general question of how the well-being of a group should be assessed. Subjective evaluation by the appraisees themselves should also have a legitimate place in appraising the status of well-being. It is patronizing and insensitive to expect a group to accept the evaluation of outsiders concerning its feeling about its own status.

Occupational Aspirations

Asian Americans are underrepresented in such occupations as journalism, law, and social sciences that require language skills and person-to-person contact, but are heavily concentrated in other fields where technical knowledge rather than linguistic and social skills are at a premium. This pattern of occupational segregation is evident at both undergraduate (Sue & Frank 1973) and doctorate (Gilford & Snyder 1977; National Science Foundation 1977) levels, and in private industries as well (Cabezas & Yee 1977).

If accepted uncritically, this pattern may perpetuate itself. Teachers and occupational counselors may come to believe that the existing pattern is a reflection of Asian Americans' aptitudes and preferences and they may unknowingly steer Asian American youths into those fields where there are role models and proof of occupational attainability.

Section 2 illustrated that the pattern of Asian American occupational choices does not necessarily reflect aptitude, but rather an adaptive response to the world of reality as they have experienced it—a preoccupying concern for survival rather than considerations of aptitude, preference, and open choice. This is substantiated by the fact that Asian American youths are apprehensive about "discrimination and biased economic competition" (Wong 1977:60), and that Asian Americans feel they are viewed by the management as good only for certain occupations and only for staff, not administrative, positions (Lan 1976:49-50). Although there is no firm evidence on how the occupational selection of Asian Americans is influenced by their perception of external constraints, it would be potentially prejudicial to assume that the existing pattern of occupational segregation is an undistorted reflection of their aptitudes and preferences.

Students need to be counseled into those fields where their aptitudes and aspirations would find optimal fulfillment. At the same time, Asian American students need to become aware of harsh reality, the reality that upward mobility becomes disproportionately blocked for them as they go up the ladder (Sung 1975; Lan 1976); that Asian Americans are perceived as suited only for staff positions and only for certain occupations; that they would be deprived of ethnic network and support systems if they were to enter the underrepresented fields. The recognition of these existing inequities and constraints, however, does not necessarily, and should not, lead to justification of continued occupational segregation.

Assimilation and Sense of Lost Identity

As Endo (1974) has noted, the increasing resentment against the Asian American success stereotype grows in part out of a challenge to the very notion of success and the sinking realization that their success (if it exists at all) has exacted a hidden, but heavy, cost. Japanese and Chinese Americans in the past have been pressured into assimilating within an inflexible mold of Americanization (Suzuki 1977b:151) to avoid the anti-Oriental stereotypes and prejudices of American society. To achieve their present level of social acceptance, the Chinese have attempted to succeed through educational achievement, exemplary conduct, and, most importantly, accommodation (Yee 1973:104). For Japanese Americans, too, the strategy of survival in the dominant White society has been that of accommodation (Kurokawa 1969).

Asian Americans have reacted intensely against this pressure to assimilate. Third-generation Japanese Americans, for example, argue that although their parents had to work quietly to earn a place in American life and to be accepted as Americans, they are Americans by birthright, and should not need to make any extra effort to earn their right to belong here (Maykovich 1973b).

Accordingly, Kagiwada (1973) reproaches the prevailing studies on acculturation because they "perpetuate the view that the assimilation of ethnic individuals to the Euro-American . . . culture is the acceptable . . . mode of adaptation to American society" (p. 162). He expresses an emerging theme among Asian American commentators when he notes that

> American society continues to restrict personal and group freedoms considerably more than is necessary by forcing the dominant perspective upon minority peoples and denying them the alternatives of viable ethnic life styles. As a result, many Japanese Americans as well as other ethnic youths find themselves facing what has been referred to as an identity crisis.[p. 162]

Recognition of these effects of the pressures of assimilation led Takagi (1973) to criticize assimilation as blatant racism and to call for the type of research that is capable of leading to the "development of an alternative theory" of ethnic relations (p. 156).

Other Asian American observers have also been concerned about the hidden, yet injurious, costs of their so-called success. They identify the hidden costs as behavioral overconformity (Hutchinson, Arkoff, & Weaver 1966), conservatism (Okimoto 1971), loss of social consciousness, (Yamamoto 1968), adoption of the dominant group's stereotypes resulting in a second-class mentality (Fong 1965; Weiss 1970), negative self-image (Sue & Sue 1971),

and the sense of lost identity. The thrust of these concerns is that if the educational attainment and material comfort of Asian Americans, hard-earned through disproportionate sacrifice and overwork, represent "success" at all, that success has been motivated by concern for survival in an alien soil, has been molded by the dominant society's assimilationist cast, and has exacted its price in the form of restricted self-definition, i.e., ethnic identity. The combined force of the drive for acceptance and the pressure for assimilation has resulted in a continued effort to emulate and "out-Yankee the Yankees." Consequently, the "successful adaptation" of Asian Americans is hardly more than a gilded image with hidden costs. This context of assimilation also reveals the irony contained in statements like "the Chinese Americans are the most American of Americans while also being the most alien of aliens" (Block 1970) and "scratch a Japanese American and find a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant" (Kitano 1969:3). Asian Americans view their identity problems not so much as individual problems of psychological adjustment, but as inseparably linked to external forces of assimilative pressure and political expediency. The following quotes exemplify this attitude:

> In the past, Asians have seen an abandonment of their own identity as the price white society exacts for their socioeconomic success. [Kim 1975a:58]

> Too often, the plight of the Asian-American is one of forced rejection of his own culture in favor of the dominant one in order to survive. This process of accommodation, which often appears under the guise of acculturation, has produced considerable psychological damage. [Asian American Political Alliance 1971:265]

> The Yellow Power movement has been motivated largely by the problem of self-identity in Asian Americans.... Now they [Asian Americans] are beginning to realize that this nation has a "White democracy" and yellow people have a mistaken identity. [Maykovich 1973b:1-2]

Others have made similar observations (Kuo 1979; Suh 1975). Iwasaki (1971) considers that "the search for...identity...is...a central problem in much of the [contemporary Asian American] literature" (p. 91). These manifestos and observations should not be regarded merely as expressions of radical youths. From a clinical perspective, a practicing psychiatrist notes:

> The issue [is] the positive sense of identity.... Here is a problem which may be unrelated to personal psychodynamics and much more due to conflicts engendered by cultural differences and the illusion of the melting pot. [Yamamoto 1968:143]

Thus, the concern for ethnic identity seems to permeate the Asian American experience of today. It is significant that Asian Americans view their feeling of lost identity as resulting from the preemptive concern for survival and the pressures for assimilation. Once the theme of ethnic identity is recognized against such historical context, the "model" behavior traits of Asian Americans—unobtrusiveness, diligence, industriousness, and docility—take on a new meaning, and we are at once faced with the ultimate challenge: whether the education of our ethnic minority students should be guided by the assimilationist or pluralist persuasion. The question of assimilationism vs. pluralism bears on sociopolitical issues of deeper magnitude that defy simple solutions and fashionable suggestions. At the least, however, we must articulate alternative paradigms and their ramifications in order to bring the conflict under public scrutiny, and to allow reasonable choices to be made.

When examined closely, the image of Asian American success dissolves helplessly, baring strands of past discrimination, sacrifice and overwork, preoccupation with survival, and the disquieting feeling of lost identity. Asian Americans feel they have paid an injurious price for their so-called success. They feel trapped in the promised land as perennial second-class citizens, and they seethe with resentment at having been treated friviously at the expediency of shifting politics. Vacuous at best are the dichotomous idioms of success vs. failure and the rhetoric that a group is a success merely because it is faring better than other disadvantaged groups. Our newly gained perspective challenges us to develop a fresh orientation toward Asian Americans and to translate into practice the insights that emerge as we demolish the premise of Asian American success as a myth.

Note

1. Contexualism, as it was originally expounded by Stephen Pepper in his 1942 classic, *World Hypotheses*, refers to an epistemological framework. It provides a unique frame for the analysis and understanding of occurrences in the natural and man-made worlds, and through the provision of unique frames, it constrains the kinds of questions to be asked, models to be applied, and analyses to be adopted. Contextualism holds that the purpose of an inquiry is to understand the total meaning of an event, occurrence, or phenomenon, and that an analysis or inquiry is meaningful only in terms of its utility for some purpose, that is, only when connected to the context in which it is being used. Contextualism is not a fancy name for old wine, as Jenkins (1974) has so persuasively shown; indeed, it has profound ramifications for the conduct of social sciences as demonstrated in an elegant exposition by Sarbin (1977).

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